

A LITTLE SPECULATION OF THE U. P. A.

BY

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY M. LEONE BRACKER

"YOUR father is sick and can't send you another cent, and that is what is breaking both our hearts, dear boy."

"Can't send another cent"—"breaking both our hearts." The words hammered in the boy's head. He skated in straight, hard strokes; no "grape-vine" swirls, no curving "outer edge" kept time to words like these. "Poor Mother! Poor Father!" said the boy aloud. No one could hear him; he was alone, and the wind was boisterous.

From senior to freshman, all Jarvis University was on the lake. The boy's face, gaunt and big-featured, had distinction among faces whose effect was not that of weakness. The grapple with problems of food and shelter puts an edge on individuality. Half the boys, and at least as many of the girls, were doing some-

thing to "help put themselves through." There was about them less of the indefinite roundness of youth and more of the shaped vigor of maturity than their years would warrant.

Eleanor Gratz, new-comer and belle of the lake, studied the faces about her with the interest of youth in youth.

"Who is that splendid-looking man over there all alone?" she asked, indicating the boy with a wave of her muff.

"That?" repeated her escort. "That's Hubbard. He's splendid, all right, though maybe you're joshing. Want to meet him?"

"Yes, I should like to meet him," said the girl decisively. "Bring him, won't you?"

A new interest, above all a new interest in a person, is powerful to obliterate pain, but youth is never so young that disappointment like the boy's can be long silenced. The certainty that

it was no nightmare, no ephemeral trial, but the laying down of life and all life meant, overtook him as he left Eleanor Gratz, and reached his lodging. He climbed the oilcloth stairway of the Widow Wirie's cottage and opened his door slowly, as if the thing he dreaded waited him there in visible shape.

The place was cold. Involuntarily he went down on his knees before the small stove, thrust the shaker upon the handle of the grate, and sent the ashes flying in a cloud over himself and the bare room; bare enough, but beloved beyond other men's luxury; his "university room."

In the closet beside the stove were bread and eggs, his supper, but he could not eat. In time, the tin kettle that topped the rusty stove cylinder thrummed seductively, and the stuffy chill of the place changed to greater closeness and an oppressive warmth, but the coal wasted, the solder of the kettle melted, and still John Hubbard sat on the edge of the wooden bed, his ash-whitened overcoat covering his stooped shoulders, his hands clenched on his knees.

All the labor, all the economy, all the struggle in the world could not keep him alive in this university town on anything less than he was now spending. He pulled at the red muffler as if it choked him, but took no thought to remove it. What work was obtainable that he had not already obtained? What activities that he could offer might create a new demand? Not one. Already he rose at four to rouse the furnaces of the Agricultural College; already he was excused from Saturday's recitations to perform the weekly cleaning of the sheds and stables at the "mansion"; already he shoveled all the snow, dug all the gardens that he could wrest from competition, and found food, fire, and books the desperate attainment of an increasing warfare. He could neither retrench where retrenchment had been reduced to a scientific exactitude of deprivation, nor acquire where acquirement had reached the limit of his grasp. There was but so much work, and there were many who needed it. "If only we had something we could sell," his mother had said at the end of her letter. "I shall pray the way may open." On her knees at that very moment, in the room he knew so well, her worn and overworked body too tired to rise from the prayer it painfully knelt to offer, he could see her. He must think of a way.

All night he tried, turning over in an inventive mind every possibility, threshing out from circumstance and place every hope, and all night he came back to the blank wall before the forbidden path.

The familiar alarm woke him from a doze. He took off his overcoat, broke the ice formed in his pitcher since the fire had died, washed his face and hands, and set forth to his furnaces. On the cellar stairs of Agricultural Hall he dozed again, and woke wondering where he was and what terrible thing had happened. When he remembered, he paid his final visit to the draughts, mounted the stairs, and shut the great door behind him. The air cut spikily into his lungs. Pulling his muffler over his mouth, he marched facing the sunrise the length of the campus.

It was late. He had dozed longer than he knew. In an hour it would be time for chapel. He turned into Vermont Street and rang Professor Wagram's bell. Before the professor's own fire, with the professor's thin, scholarly face bent upon him in sympathetic trouble, he told his story.

"It's so late in the year—the college has used every cent that its friends and its funds allow. And I—I have been using all we could spare of our salary" (the professor always spoke of *our* salary, meaning the salary that provided daily bread for himself, his wife, and two children) "for a poor girl who— Now I don't know of a soul, not a soul— If—" The professor was off on a new train of thought—"If you go home for this year, how about next? Couldn't you —"

"No; we have no money to buy machines for the farm. It doesn't pay. My father'll never be able to get again from it what he has up to now. And I'm afraid my going home will—I'm afraid it will kill my mother. She has gone without and gone without and scrimped and saved and been so happy because I was having —"

"Don't you give up. Oh, don't give up!" broke in the professor. "If you'll just stay and talk it over with my wife —"

But the boy was shy, and his eyes ached with tears that he mustn't show, and he wrung the professor's hand with thanks so inarticulate that they came to no similitude of words in sound.

The temperature outside was thirty below, cold even for Markham. The boy shuddered as he reopened the door of his room; the dead fire seemed emblematic. His visit to Professor Wagram had been his last hope. Shivering, he set himself with inward nausea to his task. He must eat, he must pack, he must go away. He had the fare to Wyandotte. His cousin worked in the Wyandotte freight yards; there might be a chance of a ride from Wyandotte to Gore, the little station farther north.

He pulled his trunk from a corner and an

armful of books from a shelf. His *Odyssey* fell open at the title page where he had written in his heavy, uneven hand:

And hear like ocean on a western beach
The surge and thunder of the *Odyssey*.

Professor Wagram had quoted it on a day when the boy's unheeding soul had been waked to its first response to English poetry, waked only far enough to long for more and not know how to find it. Who would now help him make the magnetic connection between longing and satisfaction? Hewing wood and chopping faggots with bleeding fingers, milking, mending harness, driving to Gore for sugar and salt — where in all the grim, short-summered year would be any more time for *this*? And the girl with the dark eyes, Eleanor Gratz — Eleanor! He repeated the name as if it struck a sharper note through benumbing hopelessness. Strange that this great longing, this solemn sense of a beautiful land beyond gates new found should have come to him now, now when he must turn his back on it! His hand lay on the page of the *Odyssey* in a gesture that might have been a leave-taking of the beloved dead.

He did not answer the knock that rattled its loud demand in a gay tattoo upon the door. But the door opened. The figure that filled its opening was the obvious antithesis to hard luck and disappointment. It was a sleek and dapper-coated figure, middle-aged and plump; it was a prosperous and hearty figure, and the face under the well-brushed hat was a prosperous, hearty face, and sleek. This was Theophilus Barden, active agent of the Universal Publishing Association, known to all and beloved by many as Tad Barden, beloved as thoroughly by his friends as he was loathed by his enemies, to whom his name was Apollyon and accursed. The enemies were not the minority, but few of them were openly declared; of them the boy had never heard.

"What the infernal — They say you're going away!" Mr. Barden laid a compelling and sympathetic hand upon the boy's shoulder.

"I am." The boy put down the *Odyssey* and pushed forward a chair.

"Well, I guess not, Johnnie." Mr. Barden closed the door and made himself at home in the chair. He was using one of his best manners, the half-fellow-well-met and not-too-well-educated manner. "What's the reason?" he began in a voice that astuter men than John Hubbard of Gore had found it impossible to withstand.

"I haven't money enough to stay." The

words struck in short blows, and the older man's gaze took on a serious comprehension.

"That was what I was afraid," he said. "I saw you come out of Wagram's, and I asked him — Now see here, Johnnie, don't let's beat about the bush. I like you and I'm going to help you. I've always liked you ever since the first time I saw you in to Jaquith's. 'He ain't ashamed to sell lead pencils, and he'll get on,' I said. You're going to be one of the rising men when you get out of here. You'll be a power yet, and I'm ready to invest a few loose dollars in a power. You can draw on Tad Barden for three hundred dollars, and if that don't pull you through, come again, come again. No, no; don't say a word. You'll pay it all back; it's a sure thing. Don't let that worry you; it won't me. I've put good money into lots of things not half so safe, and here's the first fifty, all I had about me, and I'll get the rest around in a week's time. Now start a fire going here and scoot for the campus. You've missed one recitation already."

"Mr. Barden," — John thrust himself by sheer force into the current — "you — you're too good — You told me your salary didn't —"

"The U. P. A. treats its agents pretty white; I've been raised, only that isn't for general consumption. There are one or two other agents that haven't been quite so lucky, who'd make trouble if they knew the Universal Publishing Association had invested a few more hundreds in Tad Barden. I'm just passing on the investment, a human investment every time for me. Now, none o' that, none o' that; I can forgive anything but a thank-you. Good-by, Johnnie, good-by."

Hubbard looked at the closed door and at the fallen books. His body trembled. "God," he said, his big hands clasped, his knees bent upon the pile of books, his face upturned, "I thank Thee, God."

And having said this, he pulled himself vigorously to his feet, built his fire, wrote a letter, made a detour to the post-office to post the letter, and trod upon dreams and clouds of glory to Wagram Hall. John Hubbard had mounted from Hell to Heaven with no intermediate purgatory.

In the year 1904 the high school at Bailey's Falls was large. Graduates were beginning to make a good showing at the State University; surrounding villages were sending their young people in increasing numbers to board in Bailey's Falls and go to school. There were fifty of these boarders.

"By a moderate estimate, sir, very moderate, they add already six thousand dollars a year to

the income of this city," announced the druggist, whose school stationery department had prospered. The Board listened to the repetition of this statement at its first spring meeting, figured in silence for some minutes on the backs of envelopes, and passed a resolution of commendation of the Principal—John Hubbard.

Some of the tributes to his growing importance, John Hubbard was unable to appreciate. He refused to advocate the introduction of the Lightwell Music Series, when his aid toward that introduction would have brought him a block of Lightwell stock at next to nothing; an offer, as the Lightwell agent explained confidentially, that the publishing company was making to a "few good friends."

To Barden, still active agent of the U. P. A., John retailed the offer.

"Did you take it?" asked the representative of the Universal Publishing Association, with a glance more concentrated than usual.

"Of course not. The series isn't as good as the one we have, Craigley's. The Craigleys are square people; but these Lightwells! Why should I have their stock without paying for it? What kind of people are they, anyway?"

"Oh, they're good enough, and their stock's all right. Don't get suspicious, John, in your old age." Barden held out his hand as they parted, and John yielded to the charm of his open manner and his smile, and forgot the Lightwells.

"He's too generous to say anything against a business rival," John commented later to his wife. "All the same, it was a bribe."

"You don't owe anything to Mr. Barden now, do you?" Eleanor Hubbard asked the question as if it had long waited near her lips.

"Yes, and always shall." John spoke quickly. "I owe you to him, and my education, my —"

"But the money? It's all paid, principal and interest?"

"The money's paid, interest and all, but not — Why, Eleanor, what could I ever do to —"

"I think he'll let you know some day — but we'll hope I'm an evil-minded croaker," she answered, and fell back among her pillows. John saw how fast her breath came after her words and gave his protest no utterance. The last two years of his college course had known but two drawbacks to happiness, the strange apathy of Professor Wagram over the announcement of the good fortune that permitted him to stay, and the aversion his dearest idol openly expressed for his ideal of all manly virtue. Eleanor Gratz had not liked Tad Bar-

den; Eleanor Hubbard did not like him now.

On this day she forgot him in planning her garden. On her couch by the study window, she looked lovingly upon the sprouting earth and thought of many things. Outside, April was unfolding itself in a fine progression of miracles; overhead, little Eleanor was toddling, noisily content. A tinge of the girl's color came into the woman's cheeks as she rested propped on her pillows. Her eyes met John's, and in the man's happiness the seven years since Theophilus Barden had come to his rescue went before his vision in a dazzling panorama. He saw himself crossing the campus that morning of hope restored, a boy with a wind-tanned face that glowed like the open door of a furnace; he saw himself in the classroom muddling the accents of his Greek prose and giving but a futile account of the hypothetical relative, yet with his soul still uplifted. And seeing himself as he had been, he wondered again, humbly, how out of the many that swarmed about her, Eleanor had chosen him!

It was on this April day of cheerful reminiscence that Tad Barden came up the Principal's walk. He was the same jovial, sleek, and happy Tad. At the sight of the visitor Eleanor slipped away, but Hubbard's blue eyes smiled a welcome, the gratitude in his loyal soul roused to an intensity almost painful. Mr. Barden, glad to meet the smile, appraised it in dollars and cents for the U. P. A. With the frankness of a friend who asks with no doubt, he plunged genially into his subject.

"Johnnie, I've come to ask a favor," he said.

John's face glowed as if it acknowledged a gift. It was the moment of more than one day-dream. "You don't have to ask; just order," he laughed in the boy's laugh he had learned late. "What is it? You know it's yours," he added quietly. "It can't be half enough."

Barden's round face took on a still more open, still more jovial cast. "'Deed and I know it, Johnnie," he answered, "and it will be a regular boost to me, and not much bother to you. I want you to hurry up the adoption of those physical geographies. I need Bailey's Falls to set the other towns moving; they'll go like a row of blocks after this one is down in black and white."

"You mean — Menhall's?" John's look said more of surprise than his words.

"Yes, yes. Our new one. I know you like the one you're using, but you wouldn't turn me down for Broadhurst, now, would you? I tell you, Johnnie, your blood would boil if you knew how the Craigley people and all their

agents, from Broadhurst down, had treated me."

"But"—John seemed to be collecting himself in cruel consternation—"I thought I told you, the Menhall book isn't accurate. You haven't looked it over."

"I've looked it over enough. Why, man, it's a thousand times more attractive than your Craigley book. Look at the pictures. If your eagle eye has spotted an error, put your teacher onto it. What's the text-book anyway? It's the teacher does the thing."

"That's true enough, but——" John paused before completing his sentence, and Barden seized the pause.

"You see, Johnnie, I've let you alone and not nagged you much about business. Now isn't that so?" Since John no longer said *ain't*, the chameleon Tad no longer said it to him.

"You have; you've been good about it. I know you haven't wanted people to think I would be influenced—and you know I've done what I could. I got the Board to put the drawing into the grammar schools partly because I wanted you to get in the U. P. A. drawing series. They're good books, and I believe in drawing."

"Don't you believe in geography?" Tad smiled his most winning smile, and John's eyes answered pleasantly. "If you do, why should you insist on this old-fogy Craigley set when ours is newer and—see here, Johnnie, I'll tell you something. This physical geography means a whole series to us. The thing's been fixed up so the listing of this book will list a regular geography set from the primary up. They aren't ready yet, but they will be in another month, and they're the best thing ever done in geographies. Once the Board lists 'em and you back 'em, they go in. You can take my word for it, they're a good thing——"

"How can you know that, Theo?" (John had never been betrayed into the disrespect of "Tad.") "Who has written the books? Some one's deceived you about Menhall's. I don't believe Menhall ever wrote it. I don't believe he ever *read it*!"

"Of course he didn't. He was just starting for South America, and we caught him on the dock. He looked it through, sold us his name, and pocketed the cash, in less than ten minutes. It was mutual accommodation. An extra two or three hundred comes in very handy for a traveler."

"I don't think it's honest. His name is on statements that are falsehoods."

"What if they are! Good Lord, Johnnie, do you mean to tell me that it is a matter of very great importance whether those bull-headed

kids get the dimensions of a crater a little off or on?—they won't remember them after their examination, not one of 'em. But if the book interests them they may go on—study for themselves. Don't lose sight of the main objects of education and go to splitting hairs."

"The principle is wrong; if one book is better than another, the public money ought to go to buy that book. The children have a right to it. It isn't this one book, or one author. What's to become of honesty, not scholarship, just plain honesty, if we bring up children on slovenly stuff—Why, see here, Mr. Barden" (John relapsed into the more formal address), "let me show you. I've got it right here; I made notes on the fly leaf. Look at that list of errors. And the whole plan is illogical, bound to teach shiftless ways of thinking. It's hack work done by a man or a woman who knows nothing of the subject but what he has compiled. And half the pictures haven't anything more to do with physical geography than they have with theology." John laid the book, open at the bewritten fly leaf, upon the agent's knees.

Barden shifted it impatiently to the nearest chair. "You blessed old hayseed," he began, still jovial, "for heaven's sake, listen to reason. Here it is in a nutshell. I'm up against it. The Craigley crowd have done me in two towns this week. I've got to put Menhall's book into Bailey's Falls. I expect you to help me. Now, will you do it?"

"You've got plenty of good books," began John impatiently. "I'll work for those day and night. Don't you see——"

"I don't see, Johnnie. It's a plain question—yes or no. If I'd ever thought——" Barden rose. He turned his back and contemplated a picture. It happened to be his own wedding present to his "friend, John Hubbard, with best wishes for health, peace, and prosperity for him and his."

John's face, grown more and more distressed, fell into a suffering blankness. He, too, stood up and, as the other man moved to confront him, fixed on his friend a look of shamed and startled inquiry. For the first time in the years since he had known Theophilus Barden, he saw the coarseness underlying the sleek, high-colored features.

"You can't see?" John put the question incredulously. "You want me to urge them to put in a book I know is bad when it means throwing out a book I know is good?"

"Now, now, Johnnie—Johnnie man," the other broke in. "It's a bit late for the high and mighty. The U. P. A. have been interested in you. They like you. They've pushed



THEONE BRACHER

"I THANK THEE, GOD," HE SAID.

you right along. Now, what are you going to do for them? You've talked gratitude and written it — now's the time to act it. You've said a thousand times you owe all ——"

"Not to the U. P. A., to *you*," burst from John. He had come a step nearer; his ruddy face was growing white.

"To *me*! What in hell could I have done for you? When I first knew you I was working like a dog and poor as Job's turkey. To *me*! Did you suppose I lent you money? It was the U. P. A. You aren't the only one they've backed to win in a tight place. And all they ask is decent treatment, no gush, just a fair exchange of favors."

"But you told me ——"

"Of course I 'told you'; you were young and green, and you'd have gone over to Wagram and — I wanted you to stay in college. Of course I fathered the loan." The agent was studying John's face through lids a little narrowed from their wide and hospitable stare. "I supposed you'd rather deal with a friend and not be bound hard and fast to a corporation, signing notes and ——" Barden stopped abruptly. The plain horror, the incredulity in John's face struck home to him the possible failure of his task.

"Now, see here," he went on in a tone carefully softened to gentleness. "Johnnie, I don't want to remind you, but you've got a good position, with a chance of going higher. You don't suppose you'd ever have had that without the U. P. A.? Why, you blind bat, the U. P. A. owned the Board here when you were appointed. That was before the Blakes and Lightwells got so busy in this region — I tell you, I need you, Johnnie; don't say you're going to throw me down." He laid his hand on the younger man's arm; the whole force of a "magnetic" personality appealed in the gesture to an affection that would hope to preserve an idol till that idol was not only shattered but annihilated.

"You're doing this to test me," John answered mechanically. Then he grasped the hand on his arm and wrung it. "I want you should listen." All the eloquence of straight, clean speech, the eloquence of a man fighting for his faith in another, strove in the words. When he stopped, at last, he was confident. Theophilus Barden, kindest, noblest of men, would respond and say the past hour had been all a joke.

"Are you talked out?" John, the blood beating in his big frame to the measure of his words, felt the empty distance of the sneer. His mightiest effort, which had wrestled against conviction, had been wasted. What was be-

hind it? Perhaps Theo was hard up. He would help his friend borrow money of Sam Beard — if Eleanor would consent — but Eleanor had always distrusted — Could it be that Eleanor, not he, had been right?

The room was the same room — vines hanging from the window brackets warmed with the afternoon sun; coals red in the grate; Jingle, the cat, stirring with a soft ringing of her silver bell among the cushions of the Morris chair; Eleanor's book open on the couch where she had left it. It did not look the same!

The growing haggardness on John Hubbard's face Theophilus Barden did not understand. He had passed the stage where he might have guessed the desolation that follows the loss of faith.

"You begin to realize it, eh? You see where you stand. And what profession can you go into at your age? There'll be no U. P. A. to pull you out of the mud next time."

"I intend to stay in the profession I am in." John spoke deliberately and waited.

"You do." The words were hardly a sneer this time; they were worse. Their entire certainty crept upon John's mind as a serpent might creep upon a sleeping man, annoying but not rousing.

"Of course I do."

"You fool." The Tad Barden, known only to those intimates who sat late with him at banquetings of his peers, showed undisguised. "And where do you suppose you'll get another position when the U. P. A. has turned you down?"

"I don't want another; I intend to stay here." John's attitude had hardened, but the horror remained.

"Not long you won't stay here. The men who put you here will ——"

"The men on the Board are my friends. The papers know me. If you threaten me, I shall publish ——"

"Not on your pious tintype you won't 'publish'! There isn't a newspaper this side Densville dare publish a word if the U. P. A. objects. You'll see what the newspapers will publish. The 'men on the Board' — how long do you suppose they'll hang to you after we've dropped you? The U. P. A. don't get cheated in their investments without some one's paying the price. This time it won't be so much you — as your wife."

"We won't bring my wife into this." Hubbard shook his shoulders as if he sloughed off visibly the confidence born of boyishness.

"Other people won't leave her out. When she's dead and buried on that farm up there in



-LEON BRACKER-

"THE BOOK'S GOING IN HERE; THE ONLY QUESTION IS,
ARE YOU GOING OUT?"

Gore, they'll say you killed her. You self-righteous prigs will murder your whole family to save your little tuppenny souls. You'll take a sick woman out of this steam-heated house in a decent town among refined people and cart her off, like a bale of hay, to cold floors and dingy rooms, and a neighborhood of miserable clods. Doctor Dean told me yesterday, for I asked him, that your wife *couldn't live in the climate of Gore.*"

John's face had taken on a look before which the stream of accusation failed. He no longer heard. He knew now, interpreting the knowledge of the past by this sudden light, that the agent told the truth. The U. P. A. could make the farm at Gore their only refuge. Was he saving himself at the risk of Eleanor's life? Grief laid hold on the roots of his soul and tore them loose. In its grip he was conscious of the failing of all supports. An awful appeal looked out of his dazed blue eyes. Triumph shone in uncontrolled answer in the face of the watcher. The jovial roundness had left that face; it was hard, calculating, evil. A smile flared in the corners of lips and eyes. Then the smile was wiped out; the puffy lids drooped. Eleanor Hubbard was in the room.

The agent waited as if to discover whether or not she meant to speak. Malice gleamed in his roving eyes. "The U. P. A. won't go out of commission because one of its friends —" he began afresh.

"I was never its friend." The dazed look was going out of John's eyes. "I was never a friend of the Association."

"Cut it out." Barden's accents coarsened as he grew more nearly convinced of failure. Then, with an effort so obvious that the two listening gave it involuntary admiration, he controlled a trembling fury.

He smiled; his face grew fuller, resumed its look of suave attention. He waved an indulgent hand toward the wife, and confronted the man. "Come now, Johnnie," he begged, "reward this brave girl as she deserves. She would go to the stake with you, but you won't let it come to that. The book's going in here; I can prove that to you. The only question is, are you going out?"

The appeal had lost its power. Whatever

Eleanor might suffer if he did not yield — John Hubbard knew this all at once — it would be no shadow of what she must endure if he failed in honor. One blow might strike at the body; the other would cut into the very intimate source of life itself.

"Once more, John Hubbard, are you going to turn me down or are you not? Say go and I go, but if I go —"

"Go." The word did not thunder upon the air, but it charged the sun-lighted room with a force nothing could dispute. It ended the agent's talk as a flood drowns out futile rills. John moved as he spoke, and the door he held open was replaced for an instant by the bulk of the visitor. The outer door clanged. The figure of Theophilus Barden advanced, dapper and dignified, to the gate. It, too, closed.

"John" — Eleanor's hands rested on John's arms; she faced him, her eyes on his in a shining tenderness; her voice held the passion of a mother for a grieved child — "John, don't miss him too much, when you have me, have us."

"*Him!* Eleanor — Eleanor — if you die — if my stupidity —" John's voice broke and lost itself. In the misery of his look Eleanor knew there was no thought of Theophilus Barden. The look was hers. "Stay with me — stay with me," he whispered.

"Of course I shall stay with you." She strangled the cough that came upon her, and he caught her in an aching, miserable grasp. "John, I will *not* leave you — I'm much stronger, and I love the country — I shall love to show what I know about a farm. Ask your mother. She's on her knees at this minute praying that you may resist this temptation — we couldn't help hearing. We're the proudest women in the world — John, if only you are happy," and Eleanor gave her weight entirely into his arms, and smiled.

June came, and the Bailey's Falls *Clarion* announced John's departure with a mitigated regret suggestive of "more behind." The county institute convened, and John was not on the list of speakers. But Mr. Barden was. He spoke on the adaptation of the text-book to the child, and he spoke well.